

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
ON REFORM OF PROFESSIONAL BOXING INDUSTRY
APRIL 22, 1999

- I am pleased to convene this morning's hearing on reform of the professional boxing industry. This is an issue of concern and legislative activity for the Committee dating back to 1994.
- I have long been an avid fan of boxing. Yet I share the growing dismay of many of the sport's leaders about how the magic of professional boxing has been plundered and sullied. What should be a sport of intense but honorable competition has degenerated into a callous industry, where too few rules or ethical boundaries protect the athletes and fans who sustain it.
- Our witnesses represent the very best this sport has to offer. Indeed, most members of the boxing industry and state commissioners I have worked with are sincerely committed to real reform.
- All too often, however, professional boxing occurs in an arena replete with oppressive contracting practices, blatant restraints of trade, and a ratings system that defies all reason. The status quo in boxing continues to undermine legitimate competition and the spirit of true sportsmanship.
- Of course, when honest and open competition is inhibited, it is the boxers who suffer the most. They are denied the personal and financial rewards that their skills and considerable sacrifices have fairly earned. But millions of ticket-buying fans in America are also hurt by monopolistic practices in boxing, interwoven with a manipulative ratings system which borders on consumer fraud.
- The lack of any cohesive private sector governing body in boxing allows customs which in any other sport would be condemned and swiftly outlawed.
- For Members of Congress and state officials alike, it is becoming increasingly clear that the interstate and international aspects of the boxing industry's dilemma's require that some reforms be enacted on a federal level. Otherwise, any state officials who are courageous enough to take a stand against unscrupulous practices will be punished by boxing's power brokers. Currently, promoters and sanctioning organization could easily avoid responsible new reforms by simply taking their events to another state.
- The recent Lewis v. Holyfield championship bout was the latest symptom of how

entrenched conflicts of interest are crippling boxing. I was sitting at ringside in Madison Square Garden that night. Perhaps the main point of the Lewis v. Holyfield controversy is that the shadowy relationships between promoters and sanctioning organizations often results in injustice and scandal.

- Ultimately, I hope the public outcry about this debacle will compel state officials and the Congress to stamp out boxing's most rapacious and fraudulent business practices.
- State officials provide direct oversight of professional boxing, and they must be the first line of defense for the interests of boxers and the public. However, limited and targeted reforms at the federal level can be of vital assistance to boxers and state commissioners alike.
- I am hopeful that the Committee and full Senate will take prompt action to again pass the *Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act*. This bipartisan proposal, cosponsored by Senators Bryan and Dorgan, is a modest but practical measure to protect athletes and enhance the integrity of the sport.
- I look forward to this morning's testimony by a truly outstanding list of witnesses. We are especially honored to have perhaps the greatest living figure in the world of sport, former Heavyweight Champion Muhammad Ali. Mr. Ali's legendary achievements in the ring are revered around the world, and he continues to grace our country with his charitable and civic activities. He was a "champion" when that word retained all of its honor and respect. Mr. Ali, in the hearts of all Americans, you remain a champion today.
- We will also be hearing from distinguished leaders from each segment of the professional boxing industry. I want to add a special note of thanks to my colleague, Senator Richard Bryan, for his continued advice and support on this issue.